

National stereotypes

“Heaven is where the police are British, the cooks are French, the mechanics are German, the lovers are Italian and it’s all organised by the Swiss. Hell is where the police are German, the cooks are English, the mechanics are French, the lovers are Swiss, and it’s all organised by the Italians.”

Discussion

Discuss in pairs or small groups:

1. Did you find the joke above amusing? If you did, is it because of what you know about these nationalities personally, or what you know of their reputations?
2. Would you like to change the joke in some way? Can you improve it by changing some of the nationalities or some of the jobs?
3. Do you have tourists from other countries where you live? Which nationalities? What are they like?

Reading

Read this article and underline anything that surprises you or that you think is not fair.

BRAZILIANS VOTED BEST TOURISTS, GERMANS WORST

In a recent survey conducted by the American Board of Tourism, professionals in various areas of the tourism industry have rated Brazilians as the world’s best tourists. The survey gave points for things like ‘politeness,’ ‘willingness to understand and speak English’ and ‘cultural sensitivity.’ People working in jobs ranging from taxi-drivers to hotel receptionists and airline flight attendants almost unanimously rated the Brazilians as being ‘friendly’ and ‘polite.’ The opposite seemed true of the Germans. “The Germans just don’t seem to get it,” said one manager of a hotel chain, based in New Orleans. “They’re rude and impatient yet they expect service with a smile. They travel outside Germany yet want to have things just like at home. Plus, they never tip.”

The best tippers are the Japanese, according to the survey. A travel agent representative explains: “The Japanese are afraid of ‘losing face’. They’ll do what they think is expected of them in the country they’re visiting, so they’re usually extremely polite. They rate very high in the cultural sensitivity category.”

The French scored extremely low in the ‘willingness to understand and speak English’ category. “It’s amazing. They can be so rude and snobby,” said a ticket agent at Chicago O’Hare International Airport. “You try to explain things to them and they answer you back in French. Not only that, they smoke too much — even where it’s not allowed — and they’re generally messy, leaving cigarettes and other rubbish on the floor. It’s unbelievable.” A summary of the Board’s survey is given below:

Friendliest nationalities:	Most polite:	Willingness to understand and speak English:	Most culturally-sensitive:
1. Brazilians	1. Japanese	1. Brazilians	1. Brazilians
2. Japanese	2. Brazilians	2. Dutch	2. Japanese
3. Koreans	3. British	3. Swiss	3. Romanians
4. Canadians	4. Spanish	4. Hungarians	4. Egyptians
5. Portuguese	5. Koreans	5. Poles	5. Koreans

Discuss with your partner what you underlined in the text.

True or false?

Read the text again and mark the statements below true (T) or false (F):

1. People all over the world think Brazilians are the best tourists.
2. The Japanese are often afraid of doing or saying the wrong thing when travelling.
3. The French are generally not very happy to speak English.
4. The Germans want to get a real feel for the local lifestyle when they travel.
5. The Germans are happy to show their appreciation for good service.
6. The French don't seem to be very tidy when they travel.

If your nationality is not mentioned in the four categories in the survey, do you think it should be?

Language

The article describes the Brazilians as 'polite' and the Germans as 'rude.' Below are some more words from the article and some other ones to describe character. Match the words on the left with their opposites on the right:

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1. polite | a. quiet |
| 2. friendly | b. mean |
| 3. loud | c. rude |
| 4. generous | d. unfriendly |
| 5. open-minded | e. messy |
| 6. tidy | f. intolerant |

Do the same with these:

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 7. honest | g. impatient |
| 8. gentle | h. warm |
| 9. patient | i. boring |
| 10. fun | j. dishonest |
| 11. excitable | k. aggressive |
| 12. distant | l. calm |

How do you think people from other countries see people from your country? Would they use any of the adjectives above?

Discussion

Work in pairs or small groups. Which nationalities do you think are being described below?

1. They're always in big groups.
2. They talk too loud.
3. The men are womanisers.
4. They're good dancers.
5. They smoke too much.
6. They're all fat.
7. They think they're the best.
8. They're violent people, I think.
9. They're so mean. They count every penny.
10. They talk with their hands.
11. They're bad drivers.
12. They're all rich.
13. They always want things done their way.
14. The women are beautiful.
15. They're all blonde-haired and blue-eyed.

Do you think your discussion would have offended people from any of the countries you have been talking about? Do you mind if your country is talked about in the same way?